

# status Report

The Quarterly Newsletter on Disability Issues in Alberta

THE PREMIER'S COUNCIL ON THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

MAY 2000

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## Discrimination at the U of A?

Premier's Council member registers complaint against university

**M**argaret MacCabe, a graduate student and member of the Premier's Council, has registered a complaint against the University of Alberta with the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission.

MacCabe's human rights complaint is based on her contention that wheelchair athletes are denied equal access to train in the Butterdome's indoor track facility.

"I don't believe the U of A is being malicious, but I do believe their behaviours and policies are being fuelled by unsubstantiated fears and absolute ignorance," says MacCabe.

She explains that the U of A allows her and other wheelchair athletes use of the track for only a quarter of the time given to able-bodied athletes. She adds that the decision to limit wheelchair athletes' time was made in 1998, when varsity track coach Marek Glowacki contended that wheelchair athletes "go too fast" and are a safety risk to others.

Strangely, in its preliminary response to the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, the U of A now says that the risk for able-bodied athletes exists because "the average speed of a wheelchair athlete is significantly slower." In the response, the U of A denies it is guilty of any discrimination.

In a March 24 article in the *Edmonton Sun*, Art Quinney, the U of A's Dean of Physical Education, described the dispute as a "scheduling problem" rather than a human rights issue. Quinney said that it's unsafe for able-bodied athletes and wheelchair athletes to train at the same time, and that the U of A is trying to find a compromise.

To MacCabe, any compromise that involves segregating disabled athletes from able-bodied athletes is unacceptable.

"The fact that this has been allowed to continue is beyond belief," says MacCabe, who has a Phys Ed degree from the U of A and is currently earning her Masters of Science in Health Promotion. "The university's own Faculty of Physical Education and

Recreation promotes inclusion for persons with disabilities. Not only does this contradict what the university teaches in its own curriculum, it falls short of provincial human rights standards."

MacCabe's complaint has been put into a queue to have a conciliator appointed, which should take place in July. The conciliator will then present both sides of the issue to the opposing parties, and try to hammer out a compromise. If that doesn't happen, an investigator will be appointed and a formal investigation will take place.

"I'm anticipating that this will be a long, drawn-out process," says MacCabe. "I don't think that the U of A's lawyers will let them do anything that costs them money or gives the impression that they admit guilt...unless they're forced by an external investigator's conclusions."

In addition to registering a human rights complaint, MacCabe wrote a letter to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, asking him to decline an Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree he is expected to receive from the U of A in June. Tutu recently responded to MacCabe's letter—he expressed sympathy for her cause and wished her luck in finding a resolution, but didn't comment on whether he would decline the honorary degree.

"Perhaps what angers me most is that, while the university denies athletes with disabilities equal access to its mainstream facilities, it delights in gaining worldwide recognition by conferring an honorary degree upon one of the world's most notable human rights activists," she says. "It's morally reprehensible."

Margaret MacCabe: university's behaviour is being "fuelled by unsubstantiated fears and absolute ignorance."



**A Real Lift!**

The Ableware Maddapult Assisto-Seat helps people with back problems, arthritis and other disabilities sit down and get up from their favourite chair. The spring-loaded seat slows the descent and locks into position when sitting. A pull on a side lever activates the seat and opens it to a 45 degree angle to gently assist rising. The seat is padded with foam cushioning. Suggested retail price is about \$300. Call Maddak Inc. at 973/628-7600 or see their website ([www.maddak.com](http://www.maddak.com)).

# Community Wins! Champions Prevail!

## Champions of Workplace Diversity Consortium negotiates government contract

**R**ecently, Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHR&E) extended a Request For Proposals (RFP) to community organizations and agencies interested in providing employment and vocational supports to persons with disabilities in Calgary. Historically, this process has been widely criticized for creating unhealthy competition and divisiveness between organizations and service providers.

However, in an unprecedented display of true collaboration, 30 organizations representing virtually all disability types began working together in January to improve employment prospects for people with disabilities in Calgary. In March, they submitted a joint proposal to AHR&E. The alliance is now known as the Champions of Workplace Diversity Consortium (CWDC).

On April 17, Alberta Human Resources and Employment announced that the contract for Employment Services for Persons with Disabilities in Calgary would be awarded to the Champions consortium. This decision marks a new way of doing business that puts the community squarely in charge of the supports it provides.

### Consortium Principles

As individual organizations have come together to form the consortium, they have adopted the principles of their own communities. These principles will guide service delivery and will be:

- Consumer Driven;
- Holistic & Inclusive;
- Broad in the Employment/Career Spectrum;
- Customized for Individual Support;
- Individual and Systemic in Advocating for the removal of barriers to employment; and,

- Non-competition with CWDC members.

### Beyond RFP Constraints

The CWDC collective vision sees much further than the scope of this particular provincial contract. The 1991 Health & Activity Limitation Survey (HALS) has estimated that there are over 10,000 persons with disabilities in the Calgary area in any given year who require career and employment support. While this particular contract deals with the 10% of individuals who are most ready for employment, members of the consortium are committed to reaching out to the entire market through their existing programs and services.

### NOT One-Stop Shopping

The Champions Career and Employment Service Centre will be developed as a key node or a hub that exists within a network of specialized services. The consortium will develop a career and employment resource capability with a critical mass of professional staff and trained peer mentors to provide basic services.

However, the Centre is not intended to duplicate existing vocational rehabilitation or employment services provided through partner agencies. Consortium members are interested in synergy, not competition. As such, the consortium will play a key role in an individual's development during the employment readiness stage. The Champions Career and Employment Service Centre will provide generic career, vocational and employment services only; referrals to individual organizations will be made for disability-specific, adjustment and accommodation issues.

The consortium also sees itself easing competition for funding. Through base funding from AHR&E, it will pursue additional federal and provincial grants and corporate funding on behalf of all 30 organizations.



### Partners in Business

Creating corporate and business community awareness, and nurturing their involvement is critical to the program's ultimate success. Traditionally, there hasn't been enough planning in the area of "community awareness building" or the direct involvement of the business community in service planning or delivery. CWDC is already developing a "Partners in Business" program, which will focus on developing corporate connections and networks. This program will be the springboard and a conduit to actively involve the business community.

In return for their support, corporate partners will be able to turn to Champions to access a largely untapped employee resource pool. In the process, they'll benefit from increased diversity in their workplace.

Through the creation of an employer advisory group that will include partners who provide expertise and investment into the implementation and delivery of services, community capacity will be built and systemic advocacy achieved through corporate understanding and involvement.

### Be a Champion!

Congratulations to consortium members on an excellent proposal. This contract simply marks the beginning of collaborative performance and service excellence in our communities.

The Premier's Council is proud to be a Founding Partner of CWDC. We urge other organizations to join the momentum of collaboration. Provincial and federal governments have been asking for employment partnerships within the disability community for years. CWDC is acting on past commitments, making the goals and benefits of collaboration a reality.

For more information, please contact John Petryshen, spokesperson and facilitator for the consortium at 403/228-3001.

## Status Report

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# Building Better Bridges

**O**n March 15, the Hon. Gene Zwozdesky, Associate Minister of Health and Wellness and Minister Responsible for the Premier's Council, released his final report on programs and services for persons with developmental disabilities.

*Building Better Bridges* summarizes over 170 presentations, 300 communications/submissions, and numerous meetings with stakeholder groups into ten official policy recommendations.

The overall theme is that services for Albertans with developmental disabilities must be needs-based, pro-active, properly funded and developed with considerable input from consumers and their families. It also recommends the needs of people with brain injuries to be similarly considered.

The Council applauds the report, since it lends credibility to our goal of extending this philosophy more globally in the form of the Alberta Disability Strategy—ADS for short.

There are other disability communities where disparities currently exist that result in funding inequities and philosophical differences in how supports are provided. Most agree that a comprehensive review of *all* persons with disabilities, regardless of the nature of disability, is required to develop more inclusive policies and programs for communities.

This is why the Premier's Council has identi-

fied the ADS as its number one priority, to be approved by Cabinet prior to year end 2001.

The ADS will ultimately be a proactive policy framework that will require partnerships with key provincial departments and community stakeholders. For *all* Albertans with disabilities, it will provide:

- an assessment to determine the scope of need
- an analysis of regional service gaps
- an inventory of existing services
- an analysis of expected costs (from which budgets can be developed)
- a policy framework for future service delivery
- an implementation strategy.

The ADS will also ensure a system of accountability for over 17% of our provincial population. The Council is currently finalizing measurable targets and will be establishing benchmarks from which annual surveys will evaluate progress or the possible lack thereof.

Like the Associate Minister's report, the Alberta Disability Strategy is simply about acting on commitments that have already been made.

The Premier's Council has recently published *Status Alert*, its first progress report on the ADS. It outlines the rationale and progress of the strategy. If you have not received this issue or have further questions, please contact us.

## Television: the Good, the Bad and the Ugly

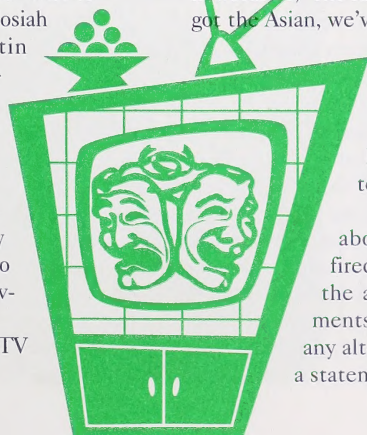
**T**elevision, which is still modern day's most influential medium, can be kind and not so kind to people with disabilities.

A surprisingly positive look at disability comes courtesy of the Warner Brothers series *The West Wing*, an hour long drama that explores life at the White House. Earlier this year, the producers and writers introduced an unexpected twist to the character of the President Josiah Bartlet, played by actor Martin Sheen. It turns out that the President has multiple sclerosis, or MS. In the episode in which this is revealed, the details of the President's disability are discussed frankly and accurately. It's definitely unusual—and certainly refreshing—for a world leader to be portrayed on television as having a disability.

*The West Wing* can be seen on CTV stations on Tuesday nights.

A *CTV News* anchor, however, can't be credited with the same sensitivity as the producers of *The West Wing*. In January, Avery Haines was fired for comments she apparently made while not realizing her microphone was broadcasting live. After having difficulty reading a script, she attempted to make light of her mistakes. "We've got a stuttering newscaster," she said. "We've got the black, we've got the Asian, we've got the woman. I could be a lesbian, folk-dancing, black woman stutterer...in a wheelchair...with gimping, rubber legs. Yeah, really, I'd have a successful career, let me tell you."

After viewers complained about the remark, Haines was fired despite apologizing twice on the air. "The nature of her comments did not leave *CTV News* with any alternative," the network said in a statement.



## Broadcasting Scholarship

Each year, the Global Television Network offers a hefty scholarship—and some other nice perks—to a Canadian student with a mobility impairment who is interested in pursuing a career in broadcasting.

The Global Television Network Scholarship-Internship Award is valued at roughly \$15,000 and covers tuition fees and textbooks for one full scholastic year of a radio and television arts program or journalism program at a recognized Canadian university or college (e.g., NAIT Radio & Television Arts) commencing this fall. The award also includes a three or four month internship at the Global Television Network for the summer of 2001. All moving expenses associated with the internship will be covered.

Act fast—application deadline is May 26, 2000. For more information, or an application form, contact Global Television Network at 416/446-5311.

### Eligibility Criteria

- Canadian student with a mobility impairment
- Secondary school graduate with suitable grade average (mature student also eligible)
- Strong English language communication skills

### Application Requirements

- Completed application form
- Copy of high school transcript
- One page written statement outlining educational/career goals, interest in broadcasting, reason for applying for award
- Three letters of reference
- Referral letter from doctor describing type and extent of mobility impairment

# Accessible Taxis Returning to Calgary

**T**he City of Calgary transportation department, the Calgary Taxi Commission, Calgary's taxi companies and a group of consumers have worked out a deal to reinstate accessible taxi service.

Several years ago, there was a short-lived accessible taxi experiment in Calgary—which failed miserably. A controversial surcharge to wheelchair users, a vehicle that couldn't stand up to the use, and limited profitability due to deadheading (drivers travelling empty across the city to pick up passengers) all contributed to the failure.

The various stakeholders have been working for the past two years to address these problems, and there is a preliminary plan in place to restart service



**Now you see it, now you don't:** the Astrovan's ramp quickly folds into place once passenger loading is complete.



using a stronger, more durable accessible type of van that will prove to be cheaper to operate.

Unlike the Chrysler minivans that were used previously, the Chevrolet Astrovan that is being tested has ramp access from the

back doors. During loading, the bumper swings down to allow the ramp to be put into place. Once the passenger is loaded or unloaded, the ramp and bumper swing back up. The modifications involved are relatively in-

expensive compared to the lowered floor of the Chrysler minivans used previously.

Currently, a training program for drivers is being finalized. Service is expected to begin by summer.

## Confusion Over Sky Shuttle Service

**R**ecently, there's been some confusion over the Sky Shuttle service and the accessible ground transportation policy at the Edmonton International Airport.

The Sky Shuttle provides service between the downtown core and the Edmonton International Airport at a rate of \$11 per person one way or \$18 per person return trip. Persons with disabilities can take advantage of this service by pre-booking through Yellow Cab—but they must book the service using the correct procedure, specifying that they need Sky Shuttle service, and not just taxi service.

There have been incidents where persons with disabilities, needing accessible Sky Shuttle service, have called Yellow Cab and booked only an accessible taxi for which, in some cases, they were charged the taxi rate of \$35 one way. Others have mistakenly called Co-op taxi, thinking they could access Sky Shuttle service when, in fact, Co-op dispatched a normal accessible cab (again, at a \$35 one way charge).

It's important to clarify that Yellow Cab and Co-op Taxi, both of whom can provide accessible taxi service, are two completely separate organizations. Yellow Cab is the only taxi cab company in Edmonton having a contractual obligation with Edmon-

ton International Airport to provide Sky Shuttle van service to persons with disabilities.

To book *accessible* Sky Shuttle van service, the customer must 1) call Yellow Cab; 2) request Sky Shuttle van service; 3) state his/her disability (e.g. wheelchair/scooter user); and 4) confirm they will be charged the Sky Shuttle fare of \$11 per person one way or \$18 per person return trip.

The Shuttle Service can be pre-booked up to 24 hours in advance. Customers travel in an accessible mini van operated by Yellow Cab—note that it will not be marked with the Sky Shuttle decals.

If the customer does not request Sky Shuttle van service when booking with Yellow Cab, they will be charged the regular metered rate for a taxi (\$35 between the downtown core and the Edmonton International Airport, and regular metered rates for all other areas).

Co-op Taxi's accessible service, which has nothing to do with the Sky Shuttle van service, charges the regular taxi metered rate for all customers. Co-op customers must book 4 hours in advance and state that they need an accessible taxi.

For more information, please contact: Jackie Miller, Ground Transportation Coordinator, Edmonton Regional Airports Authority, at 780/890-8385.

## Smoking Ruling has Disability Group Fuming

B.C. politics are getting stranger and stranger. In March, a provincial arbitrator ruled that addicted smokers are disabled. The ruling was made as a result of a complaint registered by employees banned from smoking on Cominco property at the company's smelter facility in Trail. The B.C. Coalition of Disabilities condemned the arbitrator's ruling, maintaining that the decision will simply feed widespread public misunderstanding. Coalition spokesperson Bob MacGregor says defining nicotine addiction as a disability cheapens the definition. He says a disability is something people have thrust upon them without a choice, whereas an addiction is something people do to themselves.

# Cabbie Fined for Refusing Guide Dog

A hefty \$400 fine was recently levied against a Calgary cabbie who refused to provide service to a British Columbian and his guide dog.

The incident took place last October 3rd, when Richard Marion and his guide dog, along with two friends who are also visually impaired, tried to get a cab in Calgary's downtown. Two cabs zoomed off when they saw the group approaching. The group finally managed to get into an Advance Cab driven by Gurpal Singh Dhillon.

When Dhillon realized they had a guide dog, he ordered them out of the cab. When they refused, he started driving to a police station to resolve the dispute. On the way there, he flagged down a police car, believing he had the right to refuse service.

Under the Blind Persons' Rights Act (1980), that's anything but the case. The Act clearly states that guide dogs can go into any public place or commercial business where a person can go—taxis included. And so, in March, Mr. Dhillon was found guilty of violating that law in a Calgary courtroom. With a \$400 fine, he actually got off lightly—the maxi-

mum fine under the Act is \$1,000.

Mr. Dhillon argued he is allergic to dogs, but that claim was tossed aside.

The City of Calgary also has a bylaw that says taxi drivers can't discriminate against people with guide dogs, and the city's taxi commission distributes pamphlets that reinforce this.

Despite these efforts, Shirley Dupmeier, a member of the Premier's Council from Medicine Hat, says that cabbies across the province are often ignorant of the law. Dupmeier, who is blind and is always accompanied by her guide dog Willie, has been refused taxi service more times than she cares to remember.

Despite that, she's never pressed charges against a cab driver, and she's not aware of any similar fine ever being levied in the province since the Act came into force 20 years ago. But she says the ruling against Mr. Dhillon sets a precedent, and adds that pressing charges might be the only way to stem the discrimination.

"If they're not going to conform to the rules, then, yes, I could do it," says Shirley. "This ruling is really good news."

## ASL Now Recognized Curriculum

In March, staff of the Alberta School for the Deaf announced they had completed and implemented a curriculum for American Sign Language, or ASL.

It seems hard to believe, but until the announcement, students at the school were not graded on their ability in ASL—the language they use to communicate with each other and with faculty members instead of spoken language.

Students are now viewed as having bilingual status. Since the school opened, they've been graded on their ability to read and write in English.

ASL is officially recognized as a language in many parts of the world, and has its own distinct syntax and grammar.



## Online Fundraising Makes Giving Easy

Making a donation to your favourite non-profit organization will soon be as simple as logging on to the internet.

Paving the way to online donating in Canada is a new website, [www.charity.ca](http://www.charity.ca), being developed by COL Canada Inc. (COL stands for Charity On-Line). COL Canada Inc. is owned by NRG Group Inc., a Toronto technology business incubator, and a private investor, Richard Ivey.

The goal of the startup is to simplify the charitable giving process. Philanthropists can visit the website any time of the day or night. Making a donation to any of the participating charities with a credit card will be as simple as a mouse click, and donors will instantly receive an electronic tax receipt.

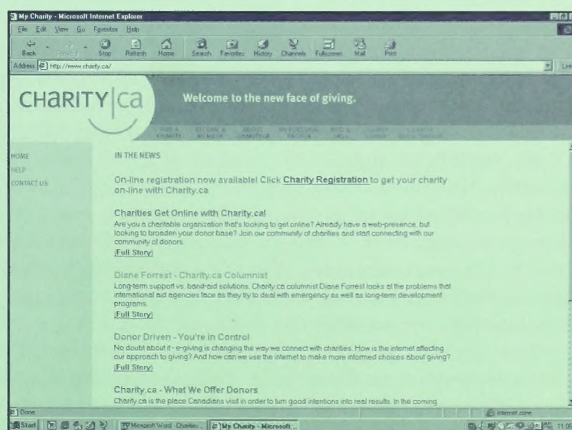
For registered non-profit organizations which sign on for the service, there are no startup fees. COL Canada Inc. will simply collect eight cents of every dollar donated. Compared to the rates of professional fundraising services such as direct mail or telephone campaigns, which can result in costs of up to 40 cents for every dollar raised, COL Canada Inc.'s rates appear to be reasonable.

With an online sign-up form, becoming a participating charity is almost as simple as donating online. Considering that many non-profit organizations lack the technology and resources to develop their own online donation service, COL Canada Inc. could have mass appeal to the thousands of registered Canadian charities.

Naturally, only time will tell if philanthropy-minded Canadians embrace the concept. Competition for charitable dollars is already fierce, and it's possible that donors may feel there is an impersonal aspect to this type of electronic giving.

The website will feature articles on issues and advice on charitable giving: how much to give, tax-saving strategies and more. As well, users will be able to search for charities by cause or location and develop a personalized "portfolio of giving" that will keep track of their favourite organizations and update them on events.

Look for a publicity campaign on the site to begin in the next few weeks.



# The Building Entrance

Part two of a four part series on incorporating accessibility during construction and renovation of publicly-used buildings

I was only four months old when my father became a paraplegic. Although my childhood was relatively normal, we didn't participate in the usual outdoor father/son activities—deep woods camping and hiking, for example. Instead, we took part in more indoor activities—movies, arcades and bowling to name a few.

As the one who could walk, I was often sent in to a building to scout out its accessibility and determine how we would enter. It was this task—finding an accessible entrance (if one ever existed)—that sparked my interest at an early age in architecture and barrier-free design.

Over the years, I've seen many unique ways to enter a building—through back lanes, garbage areas, restaurant kitchens, and labyrinth paths to hotel reception desks. Along the way, I've helped my father up and down more stairs than I care to count. The reality is that my childhood was filled with a great deal of hiking and mountain climbing.

Today's barrier-free building entrance should provide an ease of access that is simple, natural and the same for everyone. My experiences as an architect tell me that building entrances that are *truly* barrier-free are still rare. It's probably at the building entrance that accessibility for persons with disabilities and the intent of the National Building Code's Barrier-Free Design Section is most compromised.

Existing site conditions and the need to provide positive water drainage away from the building often create a great difference between main floor and ground level and therefore negate the ability to afford on grade access. Pity, because on-

grade access is the simple and natural way to design a building entrance that is best for everyone—ramps and mechanical lifts aren't required. Adding a ramp or a mechanical lift to an existing building can often be expensive, unsightly and, in the case of historic buildings, a serious cause for debate.

Ramp design, complete with key dimensions, is well documented and will not be detailed here. However, it's important to recognize that ramps should never entirely replace steps. They also should be covered and are better off located inside a

building if possible. Mechanical lifts also work better if located inside, because they may break down and usually require assistance to be used. And it's probably better to find an alternative entrance for persons with disabilities than to locate a mechanical lift at the primary public entrance.

Having said that, a primary goal of any building designer should be to make the main entrance accessible to everyone, as opposed to having a separate accessible entrance located elsewhere. Naturally, this is always more difficult during renovations

of an existing inaccessible main entrance, especially when the buildings are historically recognized. But in my travels I've visited some buildings constructed in the last ten years where the wheelchair accessible entrance is not the main entrance. In fact, I've seen some of these "alternate" entrances where the person with the disability must use an intercom system to call someone inside to come and open a locked door. This is an example where the Building Code has technically been satisfied, yet clearly this is an unacceptable situation. The Building Code is a guide that often requires positive and thoughtful interpretations. A good designer makes barrier-free design a primary focus in any new building design or building renovation.

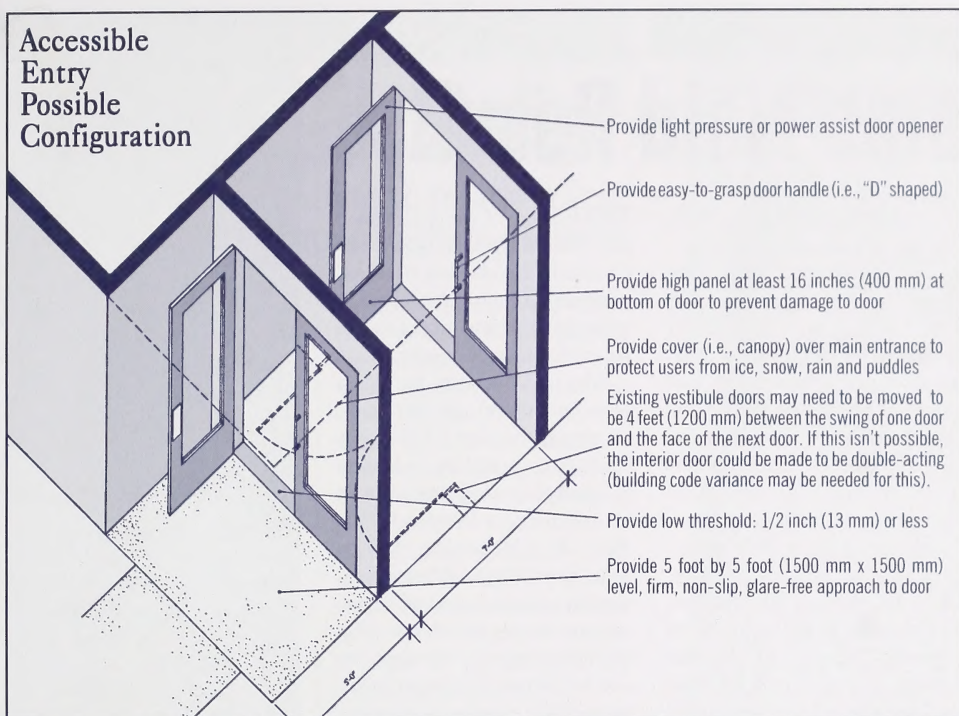
Regardless of interpretation, there are some minimum standards for building entrances along a barrier-free path of travel as set

## Accessible Public Entrances Checklist

- Is there more than one public entrance?
- Is the accessible entrance the main entrance? When existing main entrances are difficult or impossible to modify for accessibility, or where modifications would seriously damage the appearance and historic value of the structure, a window or other door adjacent and close to ground level might be converted to an accessible entrance. In the case of heritage buildings, this will require consultation on design options with a local or regional committee consisting of persons with disabilities and heritage specialists, as well as with the Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office.
- Does the entrance appear to be accessible to persons with disabilities? That is, does it meet the barrier-free path of travel criteria as described in the Alberta Building Code?
- Do the public entrances appear to be identifiable with architectural features, landscaping, signage and lighting?
- Does the entrance area provide shelter from the elements?
- Is there at least 1200 mm (4'-0") plus the width of the open door in an entrance vestibule?
- Can doors be opened by a single effort? That is, can the door be used by persons with limited arm strength? The "closed fist" test for handles and controls: try opening the door or operating the control using only one hand, held in a fist. If you can do it, so can a person who has limited use of his or her hands.
- Are automatic doors used at all? The best entrance for people with disabilities is one which has power operated doors. Where these are installed, the activator buttons should be positioned for ease of discovery and operation.

- Such power-assisted doors must operate in a manner and direction that does not present a hazard to bystanders, especially if they are visually impaired.
- Are glass entrance doors distinguishable from floor-to-ceiling windows?
- Is the door threshold 13 mm (1/2") or less?
- If door mats or grills exist are they firmly secured to the floor surface?
- Do the door knobs appear to be easy to use by persons with limited hand mobility?
- Are the doorknobs, handles or pushplates contrasting in colour to be more easily identified by persons with sight limitations?
- Does there appear to be adequate lighting at each public entrance?
- Does there appear to be appropriate signage, including the international symbol of accessibility, at each entrance?
- Is there a map of the building at each public entrance? Does it appear to be easy to read, especially for those individuals with sight and cognitive impairments?
- Are there information brochures/leaflets that would assist persons with disabilities to move around the building with greater independence?
- Is there someone at each public entrance who seems informed on the accessibility of the building?
- Is the service area accessible to persons with disabilities (i.e. a lower portion of counter)?
- Does it appear that an employee with a disability could work at the purchasing/service area?

## Accessible Entry Possible Configuration



out by the National Building Code (NBC). The NBC states that, "signs incorporating the international symbol of accessibility for disabled persons shall be installed where necessary to indicate the location of that entrance." The NBC also provides minimum standards for doorways, including:

- doorways widths (800 mm or 2'-8" when the door is in the open position)
- doorway hardware (operating devices shall be of a design which does not require tight grasping and twisting of the wrist as the only means of operation)
- doorway pressure (closer for doors in a barrier-free path of travel shall be designed to permit door to open when a force of not more than 38 N is applied to the handles, push plates or latch releasing devices in the case of exterior doors and 22 N in the case of interior doors)
- doors equipped with a closer (a clear space beyond the latch side of not less than 600 mm or 2'-0" where the door swings towards the approach side, and 300 mm or 1'-0" where the door swings away from the approach side)

- thresholds for doorways (not more than 13 mm or 1/2" higher than the finished floor surfaces and levelled to facilitate the passage of wheelchairs)
- vestibules (at least 1200 mm or 4'-0" plus the width of any door that swings into the vestibule space from one door to another)

The NBC also requires that a minimum 1500 mm x 1500 mm (5'-0" x 5'-0") level area be provided before the barrier-free entrance.

The checklist in the sidebar to the left is what I use to help me design new buildings or analyse existing buildings in order to make recommendations towards renovations.

Here are some final thoughts. During a building renovation, an existing entrance may require by code some modifications to accommodate persons with disabilities—changing doorway hardware, door pressure and thresholds, for example. In existing vestibules, walls may need to be extended to obtain the necessary 1200 mm (4'-0") minimum of clear space (see drawing), or doors may be made to be double acting swinging both

ways, although this may require a Building Code variance. It's recommended that some sort of canopy be provided to keep the entrance free of water, ice and snow. Automatic doors are also effective; options include a photoelectric cell, a floor pressure

pad and a power assisted push button that opens a door and closes it with a time delay. Entranceways with the "all glass look" should also provide identifying decals on the primary doors to be used by those individuals with sight limitations. Where revolving doors exist, a swinging door should be wide enough for an individual in a wheelchair to use. All doormats should be securely fastened to the ground, and an edge strip may be needed to provide a safer transition for those individuals in wheelchairs.

The next time you have an opportunity to impact the design of a new building or retrofit an existing building, take into account the needs of people with disabilities. Equal access is the right thing to do. Not only that, the Alberta Building Code says this is mandatory during new construction or renovations—so better to get it right the first time!

*Ron Wickman is an award-winning architect who has operated his Edmonton-based practice since 1995. He specializes in barrier-free design and has a special interest in multi-family housing and community planning. You can reach him at 780/430-9935.*

## Parking Priorities Identified

**A**lberta Infrastructure is reviewing the province's Parking Placard Program. The purpose of the review is to find solutions to the constant problems people with disabilities have in finding accessible parking.

In November, the Subcommittee on Parking Placards for Persons with Disabilities held forums in Edmonton and Calgary to allow consumers and agencies to present their concerns and possible solutions to the parking problem.

Based on information they received, members of the subcommittee identified three priorities in improving accessible parking. These are ensuring that educational programs are developed to reduce abuse of disabled parking by placard holders and the public, improving the process for determining who is eligible to receive a parking placard, and increasing enforcement of disabled parking spaces.

Other community organizations have reinforced that there is a great need for wide stalls to accommodate wheelchair users.

The Subcommittee is currently preparing a revised parking placard policy, which should be ready for review in the spring. The Premier's Council will be reviewing the revised policy and providing feedback to ensure it meets the needs of all program users in the province.

# STP Programs Yield Results

In recent months, federal funding for community-level job development programs targeting Canadians with disabilities has been heavily criticized. While it's possible that some programs have failed to deliver, it would appear that the Skills Training Partnership (STP) program does exactly what it's supposed to do.

Now in its tenth year, STP is the brainchild of the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW). The concept, which has remained virtually unchanged since its inception, is unique in Canada, according to Carolyn MacDiarmid, CCRW Workshop Coordinator & Office Manager.

"A regular job training program usually does not guarantee employment," says MacDiarmid. "The STP program model ensures that the employer makes a commitment to hire up-front and support the training process by providing expertise in customizing the curriculum, by getting involved in the interview process, etc. When the STP model is correctly implemented, the students are not training for training's sake—they're training for guaranteed employment."

Training begins with a group of people with disabilities being matched with a visionary employer. A formal training period commences, and graduating individuals are guaranteed a job upon completion. During the training process, the employer, the trainee, and the training agency are considered equal participants in the partnership. Important is the fact that the trainee isn't the only party learning in the process—employers are given the support they need to gain insight into workplace issues, such as access-

sibility and accommodation, that revolve around disability.

The benefits are obvious: people with disabilities are provided with training opportunities to learn new skills to meet the demands of the labour market, and employer partners are given a rare chance to draw from a largely untapped pool of talented and motivated workers—and meet their diversity goals in the process.

How well does STP work? Each project typically takes on 12 to 15 trainees. Of the five STPs currently taking place in Canada, the potential total number of graduates is 85. Past track records indicate that, while not all will graduate, most will.

As proof, MacDiarmid points to projects that have taken place in recent years with Wal-Mart, one of Canada's leading retailers. "The Wal-Mart retail/customer service STP (Toronto) of 1994 along with the 1997 Mississauga, Ontario and Calgary projects had a combined graduate total of 39 out of 45, and the 39 graduates became employees of Wal-Mart Canada." She concedes that it's not known how many are still employed with Wal-Mart, but adds that CCRW is currently doing research to determine job retention levels.

During its decade of existence, the only thing that's changed about STP is its scope. In recent years, CCRW has reached out to dozens of community agencies, teaching them the skills they need to replicate STPs' success throughout Canada. Training is completed through a series of dynamic workshops, and CCRW has also prepared a *Skills Training Partnership Handbook*, now available in its final version, to complement the material that is taught at workshops.

The results of this growth are paying dividends, according to

MacDiarmid. "Companies such as Wal-Mart Canada and Cendant Canada that have experienced a positive outcome to using this training model are involved in repeat projects."

Most STP activity has taken place in Ontario and the Atlantic provinces, but CCRW has used the program here in Alberta successfully in the past (the most recent project involved Wal-Mart in Calgary in 1997). MacDiarmid urges Alberta community organizations and corporations to get involved. "We encourage community agencies and employers in Alberta to develop STP projects to increase the level of STP activity in this province which would, in turn, increase the employment statistic for persons with disabilities in Alberta."

STP programs can be funded by any interested party, including community-minded corporations. Not surprisingly, however, they're usually funded in full by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC)—which has come under fire lately for funding employment initiatives for Canadians with disabilities.

MacDiarmid is a staunch defender of HRDC funding. "The employment initiatives supported and funded by HRDC, in particular the STP projects, have resulted in real jobs with a high rate of job satisfaction and retention over time," she says, adding that a study is underway to validate this statement.

"The STP model, if implemented correctly, is a very effective training model that results in the employment of persons with disabilities. Society has a choice—to continue investing large amounts of money into income assistance programs that overlook the skills and abilities of the recipients; or to change a

## LATEST STP PROJECTS

CCRW, along with agencies in Toronto, Ottawa and Vancouver, has partnered once again with Wal-Mart Canada to provide retail/customer service training to youth/adults with disabilities in these three major cities. The Toronto project began on January 24, while the Vancouver launch took place on January 27, and the Ottawa project commenced on January 31. These six-month programs include in-class and on-the-job training, and, upon successful completion of the program, the 15 trainees in each city will become Wal-Mart employees.

January 31 marked the beginning of a 12-week call centre STP taking place with Imperial Oil in Moncton, New Brunswick. The 12 participants, upon successfully completing the course, will become employees of Imperial Oil.

An STP in the hospitality industry commenced on February 21 with the Sheraton Hotel, Halifax. Once the training is completed, the 15 trainees will become employed in various positions with the Sheraton Hotel.

On March 6, a retail/customer service STP was launched with Staples (Business Depot) in Halifax. Once successfully completing the program, the 12 trainees will become employed with Staples.

STPs have recently been completed with companies such as Cendant Canada and Atlantic Wholesalers and are currently in the preliminary stages with countless other organizations. For more information on the STP model, please contact Carolyn MacDiarmid (ext. 221) at (local) 416-260-3060 ext. 221, (toll-free) 1-800-664-0925, or (E-mail) [cmacdiarmid@ccrw.org](mailto:cmacdiarmid@ccrw.org).

general attitude that creates barriers to employment for persons with disabilities. Everybody has the potential to contribute to society. By investing in employment friendly job training programs, we are investing in an all-contributing society."

# Schools Get Relief

## New rules allow funding to follow severe special needs students who change schools

In February, Alberta Learning announced it has revised severe special needs funding for students who move to another school authority after the start of the school year.

Until now, the department did not adjust funding levels during the school year to accommodate the movement of students with severe special needs from one school authority to another. Following what is called the September 30 count date, the school authority where a child with severe special needs was enrolled received that student's funding for the entire year, but the new jurisdiction would not receive any additional severe special needs funding.

"With this change the original school board will keep the funding to ensure continuity of its programs while the new school authority also will receive funding that reflects it has a student with severe special needs enrolled in its system," said Dr. Lyle Oberg, Minister of Learning. "It's a question of balance and fairness. We want to ensure both school jurisdictions have the funding to ensure they can maintain special needs programs already in place, or expand programs due to increased enrolments."

The announced adjustment will mean over \$2 million more in assistance for school boards that educate students with severe spe-

cial needs. This is in addition to last summer's elimination of funding caps for students with severe special needs, which resulted in another \$13 million for school boards in the province.

As well, Dr. Oberg noted that Budget 2000 showed the Alberta Government's commitment to the education of students with severe special needs in the province. Funding for students with severe special needs will increase by about 16 per cent to \$123 million for 2000/2001.

For all students with special needs, Alberta Learning will be spending more than \$300 million in 2000/2001—an increase of approximately \$145 million from 1995/1996.

Meanwhile, the federal budget released in February contained a specific benefit for persons with learning disabilities. No student with a severe learning disability who would otherwise be eligible for a Canada Study Grant will be denied access because of a lack of documentation demonstrating the student's disability. The government will recognize 75 per cent of the costs of one diagnostic assessment for learning disabilities (to a maximum of \$1,200) as an eligible expense under the Canada Study Grant for persons with disabilities. Students will pay up front and be reimbursed through the Grant.



Funding for students with special needs will increase to \$123 million for this coming school year.

## Income Support Fraud Results in Lifetime Ban

And you thought things were tough in Alberta.

People with disabilities convicted of defrauding Ontario's social assistance system will face a lifetime ban from receiving government benefits. The new regulations, which went into effect on April 1, threaten people with disabilities with the same penalties as any person found to be criminally defrauding the income support system.

The regulations were promised by Premier Mike Harris in last June's election, but until February, nobody realized they would be applied to people with disabilities.

Harris has been quoted as saying that income support "is for the needy, it's not for the greedy."

The policy is defended by Ontario's Social Services ministry, which stresses that the goal is simply to deter fraud that hurts legitimate recipients and taxpayers alike—and that disabled rights activists should be happy since it does not discriminate between disabled and non-disabled recipients.

Not surprisingly, the regulations have come under fire from the province's opposition party, as well as disability organizations. Marilyn Churley, NDP Social Services critic, believes the measures are unduly harsh and has pointed out that even convicted murderers receive a second chance.

Here in Alberta, the government's Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program has no plans to introduce similar regulations. In fact, the program routinely chooses not to prosecute people with disabilities who have been caught abusing the program (for example, caught collecting full benefits from both AISH and CPP), although it actively pursues collection of any significant overpayments.

## Spending Debate Over AISH

In its February budget, the Alberta Government announced it was injecting \$27 million more annually to the AISH program.

It seems like good news, but the funding hike has sparked a debate over how the new monies should be spent. Alberta Human Resources has indicated it will allow some 750 people to receive AISH at current benefit levels. Many current AISH recipients, however, have been lobbying to have the funds used to raise the current benefit level from the basic rate of \$855 per month—an amount they claim is grossly insufficient to allow any type of dignified existence.

## CPA Cries Foul

People with disabilities are being denied input into multi-million dollar Commonwealth Stadium renovations, according to the Canadian Paraplegic Association (Alberta).

The facilities are being renovated for use during the World Championships in Athletics, the third largest sporting event in the world, which will take place August 3–12, 2001.

In a recent news release, CPA expressed concern that the event's organizing committee is unfamiliar with the needs of people with disabilities, and that Commonwealth Stadium, already inadequate in terms of accessibility, will not receive the barrier free makeover it deserves during renovations.

# Reinventing the Wheelchair

The existing manual wheelchair platform remains basically unchanged since its inception as a toy for the French aristocracy in the mid 1700's. During the US civil war, the medical profession realized that the product could assist people with disabilities and the wheelchair industry was born. Since then, the concept has remained largely the same, and technological innovations with the manual chair have been very limited. The industry has concentrated on improving the existing platform.

But concern is growing about the number of wrist, arm and shoulder injuries associated with using a manual wheelchair, and two Alberta organizations are examining alternate methods of manual propulsion.

HelixSphere Technologies Inc. is a Calgary-based, publicly traded company (Trading Symbol HLIQ Nasdaq OTCBB) which is focused on maximizing human power through innovation. The company's initial technology is a proprietary, spiral, direct drive propulsion system. The company has patents pending on wheelchair, bicycle and manual powered watercraft applications of this system.

The firm's present focus is directed to commercialization of the wheelchair.

HelixSphere's consumer studies lead the company to believe that the hand-rim drive system is inherently flawed and fails to maximize bio-mechanical advantage, and that the unnatural propulsion movement utilizes weak muscle groups. This results in limited speed and power to propel. The company also says that many medical professionals believe that this unnatural stroke is the cause of many injuries to the hand, wrist, elbow and shoulders.

HelixSphere says it has ad-

ressed many end-users' needs and frustrations with its proprietary drive system. The system uses a bio-mechanically efficient movement of a straight push and/or pull of the arms. This also provides the opportunity to introduce bicycle-type gearing to the wheelchair platform. Turning is accomplished with the direct actuation of the shafts with alternate push-pull movements on the hand grips. Due to the nature of the drive system, a variety of drive wheel sizes can be introduced, which translates into a platform with easy side entry and exit.

HelixSphere has demonstrated its drive system on a conceptual prototype wheelchair model. The subsequent development and refinement of the conceptual model to a fully advanced prototype will require additional research and design. HelixSphere has initiated this process and is currently seeking consumer input to ensure that the wheelchair meets their needs and expectations.

For more information about the HelixSphere wheelchair, contact Robert Chin of HelixSphere Technologies Inc. at 403/216-5010 or see the company website ([www.helixsphere.com](http://www.helixsphere.com)).

Meanwhile, researchers at the

U of A's Division of Neuroscience are looking for suitable volunteers to test a leg-powered manual wheelchair. Led by Dr. Richard Stein, the researchers have, in essence, replaced the footrests of a conventional wheelchair with a device which allows leg movement to drive the wheels.

The researchers believe it's possible for most manual wheelchair users to use the system. Naturally, people with some voluntary control of their legs would be ideal candidates, but the technology is also being tested for use by people with paralysis of the legs by employing functional electrical stimulation (FES) to provide leg movement.

The researchers say that potential advantages of this system include elimination of upper extremity overuse injuries, decreased likelihood of osteoporosis and muscle atrophy in the legs, and greater efficiency compared to arm wheeling.

Volunteers are needed in both Calgary and Edmonton. The test, which compares wheeling with the arms and with the legs, is non-invasive and can be completed in one hour.

For more information, contact Su Ling Chong by telephone (780/492-4085) or by e-mail ([slchong@ualberta.ca](mailto:slchong@ualberta.ca)).

## Renaissance of the wheelchair?

HelixSphere's Robert Chin allows a sneak peek at the company's prototype wheelchair featuring the spiral direct drive propulsion system.



## Deadly Toxin Key to Cerebral Palsy?

Researchers in Britain have reported that the use of a deadly toxin may restore motor control in people who have cerebral palsy.

The toxin is botulinum, which is responsible for botulism, the often fatal food poisoning. In the past, botulinum has been produced in the lab for chemical warfare.

Strange as it sounds, researchers report that when botulinum toxin type A is injected in minute amounts into the leg muscles of children with cerebral palsy, the result is increased leg movement and—in some cases—the ability to walk.

It's been used for years on an experimental basis, but has recently been granted a license by Britain's Medicines Control Agency for use by those with cerebral palsy.

Cerebral palsy is caused by brain damage during birth and commonly affects coordination and causes spasticity. Botulinum relaxes the muscles in the affected limbs by preventing the transmission of spastic signals between nerve and muscle.

The treatment is coupled with aggressively physiotherapy and splints to stretch and lengthen the muscle. Muscles of the arm can also potentially benefit from treatment. Although the best results have been experienced by younger children who are less likely to have experienced muscle contraction, the toxin can be used with teenagers and adults.

Researchers say the effect of the toxin takes about three days to appear and lasts about three months. Serious side effects have been rarely reported, despite the fact that a teaspoon could kill as many as 100,000 people.

# Norquest College Focuses on Support

**L**earning is one of the few constants in life. There are many wonderful aspects of learning—it has no end, it is universal, and it's best when shared. At NorQuest College (formerly Alberta Vocational College-Edmonton) our mandate is, of course, to teach our students, but often our students teach us as much as we teach them.

That's particularly been the case with the college's Learning Support Services, or LSS. The LSS provides service and assistance to people with a wide range of disabilities including learning, sensory impairments, emotional, speech and language and physical disabilities. Using the services, all of these students are able to integrate themselves into regular college programs (Academic Upgrading, English as a Second Language or any of a wide range of skill training programs).

The LSS also provides admissions assistance, needs assessments, academic advice, classroom support, specialized courses,

advocacy and access to and training in the use of assistive technology. These services help foster independence and success.

In 1984, a student who was visually impaired registered in our Academic Upgrading program. Staff made it their goal to meet his needs. Assistive technology—some of it very innovative at the time—allowed this motivated student to pursue his academic dreams. He went on to complete Math 33. He also learned to type an amazing 90 words a minute.

In the process, he helped identify to the college that there was a need to develop more expertise in providing disability-related support systems.

In 1986, the college received pilot project funding from Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (VRDP) to develop one of the only upgrading support programs in North America aimed at assisting individuals with visual impairments. That fall, support services were pro-

vided to four students with visual impairments.

Of the original four students from the Visually Impaired Support Service, one student became a professional singer, one student became a social worker, one student continued on to become a gifted writer and a technology expert, and the fourth student successfully completed his upgrading and continues to live independently in the Edmonton area. Three of the four students maintain regular contact with NorQuest. They continue to offer advice, suggestions and encouragement.

The Visually Impaired Support Service eventually evolved into the LSS. Last year, the LSS provided services to more than 890 students with disabilities. Through the years, NorQuest has continued to meet its mandate by providing quality education and support to all students, regardless of ability.

We at NorQuest are proud to say that we are still learning.

## NorQuest SARAW System used in Court

This past December, an Educational Assistant from NorQuest College in Edmonton was subpoenaed in an Edmonton courtroom along with the SARAW computer-generated voice system. The EA and the system were used to help a disabled witness in a case. The individual, who does not have recognizable speech, used the system to testify in court. The defense lawyer moved to have the witness's statement thrown out because it was "no more reliable than an electronic statement." An insightful judge disagreed, indicating that the witness was capable and articulate before overruling the motion. In the end, the defense lawyer donated a closed circuit print enlarger to the College.

## Easter Seals Swinging in Bragg Creek

**S**ome of the most innovative recreation structures in western Canada are about to be unveiled at Easter Seal's Camp Horizon, located just west of Calgary in Bragg Creek.

The structures, which are all state-of-the-art and wheelchair accessible, include high and low ropes courses, a giant swing, and group initiatives. All together, it forms a kind of oversized playground of the type that's all the rage in many outdoor programs and corporate team building seminars.

All the structures are designed

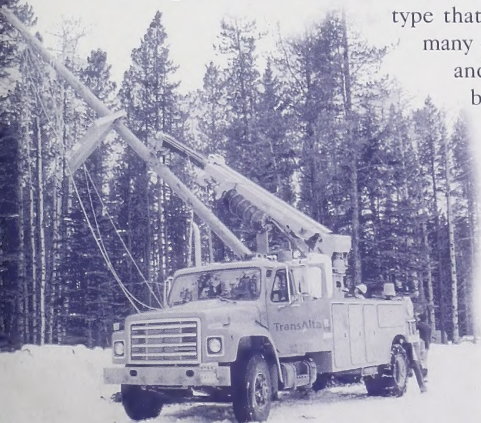
Poles for the ropes courses were supplied and installed as a generous donation by TransAlta.

to allow people to combine physical exercise with the chance to overcome mental challenges such as trusting oneself and others. High ropes courses are typically 20 to 60 feet off the ground, while low ropes courses are at or near ground level. Group initiatives are designed to encourage a team to work together to achieve success. One example is "Porthole", a tire mounted several feet above the ground that group members all have to go through without touching. It's easy to feed smaller members of a group through, but larger members require real communication and teamwork.

The courses were built by Challenges Unlimited Inc., a leader in the field of challenge ropes course design, installation and staff training. TransAlta donated and installed all the poles for the structures. Funds from the Calgary Community Lottery Board covered the remainder of the \$50,000 project.

"The courses open in late May," says Diana Gallivan, camp manager. "Groups can book them by calling our office at 403/949-3818."

Camp Horizon is a leader in providing outdoor recreation opportunities for children and adults with disabilities. Its programs focus on providing challenging outdoor activities to people of all abilities.



# Mental Health Alliance Forged

A unique partnership of mental health organizations says that mental health services are in disarray in our province. And it's getting that message through to the Alberta public.

The Alberta Alliance on Mental Health officially announced itself in February. Since then, it's had a steady stream of media coverage, focused primarily on the alliance's call for more community mental health initiatives, as opposed to institutional care.

The alliance has 12 member organizations (see sidebar), including the Alberta Chapter of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA). According to Ron Lajeunesse, CMHA executive director, the alliance is the broadest ever formed in our province.

In particular, Lajeunesse says that what makes the alliance so unique and potentially powerful is that professional organizations, such as the Alberta Psychiatric Association, and advocacy organizations, such as CMHA, have agreed to set aside differences and work together. "It's the first time ever that we're aware of—and I've been in the field a long time—that a consensus evolved and eve-

ryone signed on to a strategy to try and ensure that the government listened," says Lajeunesse.

Since forming, the alliance has been busy. Most notably, it produced a policy direction paper entitled *Good People, Good Practices, No System*, which outlined the history and context of mental health services in Alberta and pointed out five urgent priorities:

- Expand the community mental health system
- Open more acute care psychiatric beds in all regions
- Alberta Hospitals in Ponoka and Edmonton should not be rebuilt until their roles are clearly defined in a modern context
- For each dollar spent rebuilding these two hospitals, two dollars should be allotted to community-based programs
- Children's services have been neglected and should be enhanced.

In particular, it's the controversy surrounding the \$150 million rebuilding of the two Alberta Hospitals that has spilled over into the province's newspapers.

## Alliance Members

Alberta Association of Registered Occupational Therapists  
 Alberta Association of Registered Social Workers  
 Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities  
 Alberta Mental Health Self help Network  
 Alberta Psychiatric Association  
 Canadian Mental Health Association, Alberta Chapter  
 Boyle Street Co-op  
 Depression and Manic Depression Association of Alberta  
 Edmonton City Centre Church Alliance  
 Psychologists Association of Alberta  
 Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association of Alberta  
 Schizophrenia Society of Alberta

In a recent *Calgary Herald* article (April 6, 2000), Alliance Chairman Dennis Anderson said the upgrading is out of step with what other jurisdictions are doing. "Other provinces are rejecting institutional care while this province embraces it," Anderson said.

David Bray, spokesman for Alberta Health and Wellness, responded in the article that the funds for the upgrading were tar-

geted for infrastructure, not programming, and that the province is committed to increasing funding for community-based programs. "The fact is, a lot of patients must be institutionalized," said Bray in defense of the upgrading. "Not everyone can live at home in their community."

So far, Alberta Health and Wellness hasn't relented in its plan to upgrade the hospitals. But Lajeunesse says that the alliance will continue to lobby against it—even though members aren't optimistic about changing government's mind.

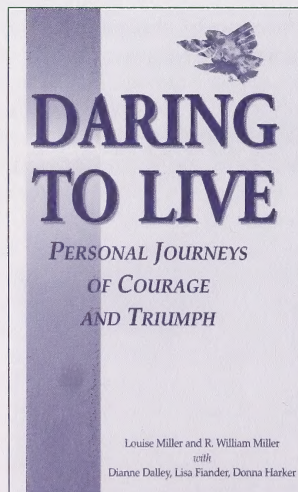
"I think the interest in what the alliance is doing, and the interest in trying to pressure government and the Mental Health Board to move in a certain direction, is certainly there," he says. "Whether we'll achieve anything positive out of this has yet to be seen, and will depend upon whether or not both the board and the health ministry are listening. And we're not feeling too promised by that at this point."

## A Good Read

*Daring To Live* is a collection of true stories of ten ordinary people and their triumph over disability. The book describes the fear, anger, hopelessness, hope and joy that each experienced as they progressed through their healing journey.

Edmonton's Louise Miller conceived and coordinated the project. The writers were Dianne Dalley, Lisa Fiander, Donna Harker and R. William Miller.

The book can be purchased for \$19.99 at most major bookstores in Alberta.



## calendar of events

May 7 - 9, 2000

The Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission on behalf of the Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies presents a National Human Rights Conference. Location: Banff. Theme: building a human rights culture: tools for transformation. Contact ICDR at 800/378-3199.

June 1 - 3, 2000

The Wild Rose Foundation presents Vitalize 2000 Conference. Location: Telus Convention Centre in Calgary. Theme: providing the volunteer sector with a chance to develop new skills and network with others. Contact: 780/422-2247.

